

CD 2009--123



UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO
FACULTY OF MUSIC

ORCHESTRA SERIES

University of Toronto Symphony Orchestra
David Briskin, conductor

Saturday, December 5, 2009
7:30 p.m. MacMillan Theatre
Edward Johnson Building



09|10
SEASON

University of Toronto Symphony Orchestra
David Briskin, conductor

PROGRAM

Fantasy-Overture: Romeo and Juliet

Pyotr Il'yich Tchaikovsky
(1840-1893) 26

Piano Concerto No. 1, in F sharp minor, Op. 1

Sergei Rachmaninoff
(1873-1943)

Vivace - Moderato
Andante
Allegro vivace

Emily Chia-Lin Chiang, piano 27

- INTERMISSION -

Symphony No. 2, in B minor

Alexander Borodin
(1833-1887)

Allegro
Scherzo (Prestissimo)
Andante -
Allegro 26

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Program Notes

 PETER IL'YICH TCHAIKOVSKY
(1840-1893)

Fantasy-Overture: Romeo and Juliet (1869, rev. 1870, 1880)

"What ineffable beauty, what burning passion!" Rimsky-Korsakov wrote of the great love theme that is so memorable a part of Tchaikovsky's *Romeo and Juliet*. "It is one of the finest themes in all of Russian music." And so it has remained in the 13 decades since Tchaikovsky's earliest masterpiece reached its final shape. But the route by which it came to be the theme that everyone carries home in their head after the concert was circuitous.

The framework for the theme was provided by Mily Balakirev, the Russian composer, just three years older than Tchaikovsky himself, whose profoundly nationalistic vision for Russian music was steering - sometimes bullying - the creative energies of the composers of the *moguchaya kuchka* ("Mighty Handful"). Even the concept of an orchestral piece based on Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* originated with Balakirev. When Tchaikovsky admitted to a creative block in October 1869, Balakirev relished the opportunity of using his own *King Lear* overture as a template for creativity.

Supplying the indecisive Tchaikovsky with a four-bar, sword-clashing theme suggestive of the conflict between the Montague and Capulet families, Balakirev then drolly advised him to don galoshes and pound the boulevards of Moscow in search of inspiration. He even followed up with a detailed sonata-form plan and key scheme for the piece. The prescription evidently worked and three weeks later Tchaikovsky was able to write: "A large portion of what you advised me to do has been carried out as you instructed. In the first place, the scheme is yours: the introduction depicting the friar, the struggle [Allegro], and love [second subject]. Secondly, the modulations are yours: the introduction in E, the Allegro in B minor and the second subject in D flat."

With Tchaikovsky's creativity unblocked, a tug of war for control over the Fantasy-Overture

resulted - Balakirev ever eager to proffer criticism and advice, Tchaikovsky cautiously releasing just fragments of themes to his mentor before the work was published and performed. Even so, with barely two dozen bars of themes available to him, Balakirev was ready with his critical pen. The love theme, he suggested, had little in it of "inner, spiritual love, and only a passionate physical languor (with even a slightly Italian hue) - whereas *Romeo and Juliet* are decidedly not Persian lovers, but Europeans." Tchaikovsky ignored the advice, leaving his magnificent theme memorably scored on its first appearance for cor anglais and muted violas. He also ignored the pleas of friends who called for a quiet ending to the overture in preference to Tchaikovsky's loud, triumphant chords - which, Tchaikovsky well knew, brought an implicit echo of the earlier conflict and the stark horror of its consequences. Still, he did listen to Balakirev's rejection of his portrayal of Friar Laurence at the very opening of the overture and re-worked it, at Balakirev's suggestion, into "something like Liszt's chorales . . . an ancient Catholic character resembling that of Orthodox (church music)." Tchaikovsky's deftest revision was in removing the love theme from the central development section to heighten the impact of its return later in the piece, fully orchestrated and greatly extended. His aim through the long process was not to follow Shakespeare closely, but rather to focus on extracting the emotional essence of the drama - that of ardent young love thwarted and driven fatefully towards tragedy.

Tchaikovsky revised the overture once more, without Balakirev's intervention. In 1880, with the experience of the Fourth Symphony behind him, he felt that some of its themes had further potential and that a tragic variation of the love theme would have a fitting place in the coda. It is this revised version of the Fantasy-Overture that is generally played today. Tchaikovsky found his voice through the composition of his earliest masterpiece, a process that lasted more than a decade. Although their relationship changed during this process, he dedicated the piece, appropriately, to Balakirev.

SERGEI RACHMANINOFF (1873-1943)
Piano Concerto No.1, in F sharp minor, Op. 1
(1890-1, rev. 1917)

As befits a composer who was one of the towering keyboard virtuosi of his time, Rachmaninoff's First Piano Concerto was also his first published work. He wrote it at the age of 17, while a student at the Moscow Conservatoire and gave the first performance (of the first movement only) at a student concert in March 1892. Then he did not play the work again for almost two decades – although his older cousin and teacher Alexander Siloti did. He had requests for performances of the piece but declared, in 1908: "It will have to be written afresh, for the orchestration in it is worse than the music." In 1917, building on the experience of the Second and Third Piano Concertos and on a quarter century of practical experience as a pianist and conductor, the 44 year-old composer had a change of heart and sensed something worth preserving in the youthful concerto.

Concerts were suspended during the Russian Revolution. Rachmaninoff found himself restricted to his Moscow apartment, unwilling to travel to his country estate at Ivanovka, south-east of Moscow, where he had invested the bulk of his earnings but where the peasants were already sensing the upper hand. He began to revise his first completed concerto with machine-guns and rifle shots sounding in the streets below, between rounds of night-watch duty on his apartment block with fellow residents. The revision was to be the last work he completed (apart from three short piano pieces) before leaving Russia for a Swedish concert tour and life in the United States. He gave the première in New York January 28, 1919.

Rachmaninoff left the opening fanfare and flourish, reminiscent of the Grieg concerto, though more powerful in its impact, untouched. It is the only such opening in any of his works for piano and orchestra. After this, though, he put the orchestration to a thorough revision and made the piano part both more transparent and technically complex – more in line with the bravura demands of the two subsequent concertos. The opening theme is quintessential Rachmaninoff: melancholy and brooding, ever-

expanding in its broad sweep and arch-like design. It contrasts well with the scampering piano filigree and rippling scales that follow. The second theme is cut from a rather too similar cloth and may reflect the inexperience of the young composer. Both themes provide the building blocks for a powerful and structurally important piano cadenza which provides the climax of the movement.

Rachmaninoff originally wrote the second and third movements at white heat. "Composed and scored the last two movements in two and a half days," he wrote to a friend at the time. "You can imagine what a job that was. I wrote from five in the morning till eight in the evening. So, after finishing the work, I was terribly tired." The short slow movement, just 74 bars, opens with a Grieg-like chord sequence and evolves into a deeply romantic nocturne in which the piano reflects on the lyrical themes. The exhilarating finale skilfully juxtaposes a crisp *capriccioso* main theme which Rachmaninoff cunningly extends with a generously romantic and expansive theme, which appears just once. His revision of the movement tightens the structure and makes the conclusion a highly effective curtain closer. "It is really good, now," he told his friend Alfred Swan after working on the concerto. "All the youthful freshness is there, and yet it plays itself so much more easily."

ALEXANDER BORODIN (1833-1887)
Symphony No. 2, in B minor (1869-75)

"Mr. Borodin - busy yourself a little less with songs," the young Borodin's chemistry professor announced to his third-year university class one day. "I'm putting all my hopes in you as my successor, but all you think of is music: you can't hunt two hares at the same time." Borodin, famously, did not heed the advice; chemistry and music were to compete for his time throughout his life. As a research chemist at the St Petersburg Academy of Medicine and Surgery, notably in the field of aldehydes, more than 40 research projects and scientific publications carried Borodin's name. In mid-career, when he concluded that his research was insufficiently funded to compete with Western European laboratories, Professor Borodin focused more

on his teaching. Thanks to his support, a School of Medicine for Women was established in St. Petersburg and the Tsar's government began to allow women students to study chemistry for the first time. A statue to Borodin the chemist, rather than Borodin the composer, was erected in Soviet times.

Borodin's status as a "Sunday composer" (his own words) meant that he was little known by the Russian musical establishment. Like his friend Mussorgsky, he allied himself with the national aims and mutual support of the St. Petersburg *kuchka*, opening himself at times to Balakirev's persistent encouragement. Like Mussorgsky, Borodin could be bold and original in ways that were often misunderstood by the academically-minded. His rhythmic writing is dynamic, his slow, lyrical melodies paint expansive landscapes, his orchestration favours bright colours, and his subject matter is frequently inspired by Russian history and folk tales. "Your artistic instinct is such that you need not fear to be original," Liszt told him in Weimar in 1877 when Borodin was visiting nearby Jena to discuss matters concerning some of his students. "Your Second Symphony is entirely new. Nobody had done anything like it. And it is perfectly logical in structure."

Borodin began work on the symphony in 1869 around the time that he first began to contemplate the epic opera *Prince Igor*, based on a 12th century poem evoking a strongly nationalist and exotically oriental theme. Borodin was to wrestle with the opera for the remaining two decades of his life and it was eventually completed by fellow *kuchka* colleagues Rimsky-Korsakov and Glazunov. His First Symphony, mentored bar-by-bar by Balakirev, had taken more than five years to complete and had recently been given a successful première; the Second was to take even longer. Something of the drama and atmosphere of the opera and, indeed, some of the music itself found its way into the symphony. We have it on the authority

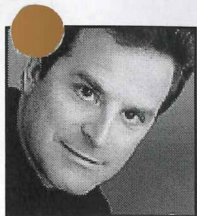
of Vladimir Stasov, the literary leader of the *kuchka* that the first movement includes music associated with heroic Russian warriors of old (the *bogatyr*s), the third portrays the song of a *bayan* (troubadour) and the finale a great feast and merrymaking to the sound of the *gusli*, the bardic psaltery, while a great crowd rejoices.

The symphony opens dynamically with a concise and assertive motto theme which keeps the score taut and to the point. For the rest of the movement, this continues to be juxtaposed and occasionally blended with a contrasting lyrical and metrically different second theme - all within a traditional first-movement framework. The brief second theme is to recur in the orientally-coloured trio section of the second movement, a sparkling scherzo and again, more disguised, in the finale. Borodin did much of the work on the symphony in April 1870 and throughout 1871 in time borrowed from his research and teaching. He is at his most expansive in the evocative slow movement, with its stirring horn melody - a reminder of how thoroughly Borodin had absorbed the spirit of Russian folk-music and developed the skills to utilize it in a convincing symphonic manner. As he develops the material, fragments of the stern motto theme temper any inclination to indulgence. This fine movement leads without break to an exuberant finale, made up, like much of the symphony, of short melodic cells and again built into a tight sonata structure. That Borodin could write so convincing a symphonic work in between his principal employment and composition of both *Prince Igor* and the abortive opera *Mlada* is, perhaps, reflective of a research scientist's highly focused mind. Borodin's Second Symphony is the finest of any composed by the five composers of the *kuchka*, their guru Balakirev included.

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Comments welcomed: khnnotes@sympatico.ca

Biographies



A conductor renowned for the versatility of his repertoire and the depth of his musical interpretations, **DAVID BRISKIN** has been the Music Director and Principal Conductor of The

National Ballet of Canada since 2006. In July 2008, he was appointed Director of Orchestral Studies at the University of Toronto Faculty of Music and Conductor of the University of Toronto Symphony Orchestra.

Prior to his appointment with the National Ballet, Mr. Briskin served as conductor with American Ballet Theatre for seven years, leading performances at the Metropolitan Opera House, New York's City Center and in major opera houses throughout the world. Mr. Briskin is a regular guest conductor with the New York City Ballet and San Francisco Ballet and has appeared with numerous ballet and modern dance companies throughout North America.

In addition to his work in dance, Mr. Briskin has enjoyed great success on the concert stage. He has conducted the Pittsburgh, Detroit, Baltimore, Indianapolis, Syracuse, Akron, Cincinnati Pops, and Singapore Symphony Orchestras; the Hong Kong Philharmonic, the Juilliard Symphony and the National Symphony Orchestra of Costa Rica where he conducted the Latin American premiere of John Corigliano's monumental First Symphony. Equally at home in the opera house, Mr. Briskin's opera schedule has taken him throughout the U.S., Canada and Europe, including performances of *La Bohème* in Italy; with the Calgary Opera, Manitoba Opera, Opera Carolina, Opera Columbus, New England Conservatory, Sarasota Opera, and

Lake George Opera. For six years he served as the Music Director of the Masterwork Chorus and Orchestra, conducting annual performances of Handel's *Messiah* at Carnegie Hall.

Raised outside of Boston, he attended the Indiana University School of Music and received a Bachelor of Music degree in orchestral conducting from the University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music and a Master's degree from Queens College, City University of New York.



EMILY CHIA-LIN

CHIANG is a pianist with multifaceted interest in a variety of repertoire. She has performed across Canada and the United States. With a recent performance

at the Canadian Opera Company for the New Music Festival, Ms. Chiang is emerging as one of Toronto's most exciting young artists. A native of Taipei, Taiwan, Ms. Chiang moved to Canada in 1994. Since then Emily has won many awards and prizes at competitions, including the third prize in the Hellam International Piano Competition (2005), first prize in the Lima Symphony Concerto Competition (2003) and was a recipient of the Winspear Fund for several years. Emily has studied and participated in master classes with such renowned artists as Menahem Pressler, Arnaldo Cohen, Alvin Chow, Alexandra Munn, Julian Martin, John Perry, and Emanuel Krasovsky. Having recently graduated from Indiana University with a Master of Music degree, Ms. Chiang is now working toward a Doctor of Musical Arts degree at the University of Toronto under the tutelage of Marietta Orlov.

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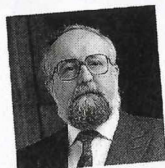


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Chamber Music of Penderecki, Part I

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Erika Raum & Alexa Wilks, violin; Teng Li, Alex McLeod
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cello; Lydia Wong, piano.
Pre-concert talk: 6:45 pm. Walter Hall. FREE

January 28 - 12:10 pm

Conversation with Penderecki

Walter Hall. FREE

January 28 - 7:30 pm

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& Lydia Wong, piano. Walter Hall. FREE

January 29 - 12:10 pm

Duo Contempera

New music for cello and accordion. David Hetherington, cello,
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Penderecki: Threnody
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January 30 - 8:00 pm

January 31 - 3:00 pm

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